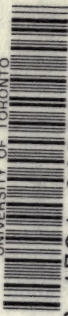


UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



3 1761 00060390 2

PR
6001
S7V6
1916

Asquith, Herbert
The volunteer, and other
poems.



THE VOLUNTEER AND OTHER POEMS

By
HERBERT ASQUITH

LONDON
SIDGWICK & JACKSON, LTD.
3 Adam Street, Adelphi
1916

One Shilling net

THE VOLUNTEER
and Other Poems

THE VOLUNTEER AND OTHER POEMS

By
HERBERT ASQUITH

LONDON
SIDGWICK & JACKSON, LTD.
3 Adam Street, Adelphi
1916



All rights reserved

First Impression, December, 1915.

Second Impression, January, 1916.

PR

6001

S7V6

1916

628701

9.2.56



To
C. A.

For kind permission to reprint some of
these verses my thanks are due to the Editors
of the *Spectator* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

H.A.

THE VOLUNTEER.

HERE lies a clerk who half his life had
spent
Toiling at ledgers in a city grey,
Thinking that so his days would drift away
With no lance broken in life's tournament :
Yet ever 'twixt the books and his bright eyes
The gleaming eagles of the legions came,
And horsemen, charging under phantom
skies,
Went thundering past beneath the ori-
flamme.

And now those waiting dreams are satisfied ;
From twilight to the halls of dawn he went ;
His lance is broken ; but he lies content
With that high hour, in which he lived and
died.

And falling thus he wants no recompense,
Who found his battle in the last resort ;
Nor needs he any hearse to bear him hence,
Who goes to join the men of Agincourt.

THE WESTERN LINE.

FLANDERS, 1915.

THOR draws a chord invisible
Across the shaking sky :
I hear the tearing of the shell,
The bullets sing and cry,
As, charging through the flames of hell,
The batteries go by.

The gunners laugh about the task,
That man to man has given :
Like Titans, now the guns unmask
And fire the veils of heaven.
Above the cloud what lights are gleaming ?
God's batteries are those,
Or souls of soldiers homeward streaming
To banquet with their foes ?
The floods of battle ebb and flow,
The soldiers to Valhalla go !

They say that, when the day awoke
And the dying night was wan,
Harry of England rode the smoke,
And led the English van :

And bowmen in the battle-glare
 Rose from the ghostly dew :
The clothyard sang upon the air
 And the grey goose-feather flew !
Harry of England is awake,
His archers mind not trench or stake !

And men have seen the Emperor,
 The Eagle of the South :
God grant the bonds be loosed by Thor
 That bind that marble mouth !
The silver roads of conquest lie
 Fast frozen in his brow :
Would those imperious lips were free
 To give their orders now !
The floods of battle ebb and flow,
The soldiers to Valhalla go !

Beyond the thunder of the guns,
 Beyond the flaming line,
Far from this sky of echoing bronze,
 The English valleys shine,
The gardens moated in the wolds
 By wind and water kissed,
And dainty girls, that England folds
 In sunshine and in mist.
The floods of battle ebb and flow,
The soldiers to Valhalla go !

The soldier has his girls to love,
And he has his rum to drink,
But, when the lines of battle move,
He has little time to think :
Sometimes he wins a victory ;
Somewhere the battle ends ;
And there the paths of glory lie,
Where lie the soldier's friends.
The floods of battle ebb and flow,
The soldiers to Valhalla go !

The fighting men go charging past,
With the battle in their eyes,
The fighting men go reeling past,
Like gods in poor disguise :
The glorious men whom none will see,
No wife or mother more,
Winged with the wings of Victory,
And helmeted by Thor !
Above the cloud what lights are gleaming ?
God's batteries are those,
Or souls of soldiers homeward streaming
To banquet with their foes ?

THE FALLEN SUBALTERN.

THE starshells float above, the bayonets
glisten ;
We bear our fallen friend without a sound ;
Below the waiting legions lie and listen
To us, who march upon their burial-
ground.

Wound in the flag of England, here we lay
him ;
The guns will flash and thunder o'er the
grave ;
What other winding sheet should now array
him,
What other music should salute the brave ?

As goes the Sun-god in his chariot glorious,
When all his golden banners are unfurled,
So goes the soldier, fallen but victorious,
And leaves behind a twilight in the world.

And those, who come this way in days here-
after,
Will know that here a boy for England fell,
Who looked at danger with the eyes of laugh-
ter,
And on the charge his days were ended
well.

One last salute ; the bayonets clash and
glisten ;

With arms reversed we go without a sound :
One more has joined the men who lie and
listen

To us, who march upon their burial-
ground.

1915.

WAR'S CATARACT, 1915.

IN this red havoc of the patient earth,
Though higher yet the tide of battle
rise,
Now has the hero cast away disguise,
And out of ruin splendour comes to birth.
This is the field where Death and Honour
meet,
And all the lesser company are low :
Pale Loveliness has left her mirror now
And walks the Court of Pain with silent
feet.

From cliff to cliff War's cataract goes down,
Hurling its booming waters to the shock ;
And tossing high their manes of gleaming
spray
The crested chargers leap from rock to
rock,
While over all, dark though the thunder
frown,
The rainbows climb above to meet the
day.

TO A BABY FOUND PADDLING
NEAR THE LINES.

HAIL ! O Baby of the May
In the bubbling river-bed,
Playing where the cannon play,
With the shrapnel overhead !
Sparkling in and flashing out
Through the eddies and the shallows,
With your feet among the trout,
And your head among the swallows ;
While the wag-tails on the daisies
Lead you in the minuet,
Twinkling through the flow'ry mazes,
Baby, do you quite forget
That, with shrapnel overhead,
Other babes are put to bed ?

Baby, may the buttercup,
When you tumble, pick you up ;
If you fall beside the willow,
Lilies rise to be your pillow !
In the winter should you go
Straying far without a rest,
Down beneath the drifting snow
May you be the mouse's guest ;

May the bull-frog be your Knight,
And the tit your templar true !
May the fairy guide you right
Wandering through a misty land,
At the crossings of the dew,
With the rainbow in her hand !
Should you fall from branches high
And go tumbling down the sky,
May the heron in the air
Take you floating on his wings,
And the cloudlets be your stair,
Over palaces of Kings :
Riding high above the wold,
Larks your sentinels shall be,
Challenging with tongues of gold
Those who try to cage the free !

So, philosopher of May,
With my blessing go your way !
If you win such friends as these
You need never have a care,
Cannon you may safely tease,
And may juggle, at your ease,
With the whizzbang in the air :
Though the world be full of sadness,
You may still have fun and gladness,
And be happy for a day,
Playing where the cannon play.

ARES, GOD OF WAR.

UNDER the stars the armies lie asleep :
Between the lines a quiet river flows
Through brakes of honeysuckle and of rose
And fields where poppies droop in languor
deep :

The night as with a mantle now enfolds
The muffled forms upon the pasture low ;
The scent of thyme comes down across the
wolds,
And on the roses of the dark hedgerow
The summer starlight falls in flakes of silver
snow.

Here from the wooded haunt of nymph and
fawn

The hidden guns peer forth across the
hills,

Their wheels are on the trampled daffodils,
And so they wait the coming of the dawn.
In dappled shadows, where the fairy weaves
On grasses tall his web of sparkling lace,
The gunners lie, their heads upon the
sheaves :

White falls the moon on many a sunburnt
face,

That ere the day shall feel another God's
embrace.

Among the barrows of the sunken plain,
Where sleep the soldiers of another day,
On misty meadow and on upland gray,
On many eyes that close but once again,
The peaceful earth her benediction throws
In waves of healing music from the streams,
That through the willows softly comes and
goes ;

And now the face of all the country seems
A mirror consecrated to an army's dreams.

From far away is borne a woman's pray'r
To Ares, restless in his iron crown :
" Sleep, Ares, sleep ! For, once the dice are
thrown,

Empires to thee are leaves upon the air !
Ere all the homes go smoking to the skies,
And men are swept upon the battle-blast,
Ere all the tears are wept from women's
eyes,

O Queen of Love, hold now thy Lover fast,
And let him taste eternal anodyne at last ! "

But with the dawn there comes a soldier's
song :

" When all the guns have fired their last
salute,

And all the tongues of all the world are mute,
And life is dearer than to right a wrong,

Then may he weary of his burning wine,
Then lay aside at last his crimson mail,
And rest for ever in the arms divine
Of Aphrodite passionate and pale—
But hark ! He comes ! Hail, Ares ! Lord of
thunder, Hail ! ”

“ He rides above the ocean and the snow,
His trail is on the curtain of the skies :
Brighter than dawn, his young eternal eyes
Shine in the eyes of Valour far below :
Now Mammon hides beneath his trembling
halls,
While Honour marches singing into war ;
On strange forgotten hearts a radiance
falls,
As ever nearer, burning from afar,
The sword of Ares gleams above the morn-
ing star.”

“ The other gods are weaker ; thou alone
Dost break the King and bend the Em-
peror’s Knee :
Lower than unto Christ they bow to thee,
Lord of the Slave, and Guardian of the
Free,
Steel-hearted Ares, shaker of the Throne ;
Young God of battle, restless lover, hail !

For, once a man has seen thine eyes aflame,
And mounted on the horses of the gale,
Death is a nothing, life an empty name :
Arise and lead us ere our blood be tame,
O Lord of Thunder, Ares of the Crimson
Mail ! ”

January, 1914.

JEWELS.

A YOUNG MAN TO A MERCHANT.

OLD Man, your pearls are not for us,
Your rubies die too soon :
Have you the pearls of Sirius,
Or opals of the moon ?

I do not ask for other gems ;
Flashing with frost and fire
The sky's undying diadems
Shall be my love's attire.

Emeralds, that into rubies melt
Upon the brow of night,
I've taken from Orion's belt
To make her girdle bright.

On high ways of the albatross
I scale the purple air
For sapphires of the Southern Cross
And wreathe them in her hair.

Her robe it is the morning sky,
Her veil it is the West ;
So robed, so veiled my love will fly,
When I am gone to rest.

Yet all the rays of all the moons,
The lights of all the skies
Are pale beside the dim lagoons
Of those mysterious eyes.

Old Man, your pearls are not for us,
Your rubies die too soon :
Have you the pearls of Sirius,
Or opals of the moon ?

1913.

VENICE.

IN domes of dim and ancient gold,
In cloisters, where the lightning plays,
Where gleam the gorgeous saints of old
In aisles of jade and chrysoprase,
In halls that wave like waving water,
Still moves the voice of Ocean's daughter.

Venice! What siren music then
Stirred on the shoals and shallow sea,
When that small band of wandering men
First in their dreams imagined thee,
And hung that lyric splendour high
Between the water and the sky!

What Triton strains in other days
Were heard, when, on a sea of flame,
Thy battlefleet swung through the haze,
And homeward in her glory came,
Bearing the beauty of the East
To make Thy happy saint a feast.

Now, though that sceptre-hand be cold,
Those argent argosies no more
Their Tyrian-tinted wings unfold
From Cyprus unto Elsinore;
With broken sword, and banner furled,
How dies the Siren of the world?

The cloud has lifted from the stars,
And now again the starlight falls ;
Now Venus calls again to Mars,
And Bacchus reels about his halls ;
And, lovely in a thousand forms,
Our Lady drifts above the storms.

Among the moonlit marble lace,
That wreathes this avenue forlorn,
Some God has made his dwelling place
And takes his manna from the morn,
And every young and wandering soul,
That passes here, must pay its toll.

Far off the city fades away,
Save where one tow'r of rosy light,
Like some dissolving shaft of day,
Pierces the bosom of the night :
The distant lightning breaks its shroud :
Valhalla gleams beyond the cloud.

Alone we float through gulfs remote,
The black canal no longer seen ;
My boat it is a fairy boat,
Above the ripple silver-green,
Upon the wavelet violet-crowned,
My boat and I are outward bound !

1913.

By RUPERT BROOKE

POEMS

(Originally issued in 1911)

Ninth Impression

2s. 6d. net

1914, AND OTHER POEMS

With a Portrait in Photogravure

Tenth Impression

2s. 6d. net

LETTERS FROM AMERICA

With a Preface by HENRY JAMES, and a
hitherto unpublished Portrait in Photogravure
after a Photograph by Sherril Schell. 7s. 6d. net

LONDON

SIDGWICK & JACKSON, LTD.

*Printed by The Westminster Press,
411A Harrow Road, London, W.*



ND 14-10-59

PR
6001
S7V6
1916

Asquith, Herbert
The volunteer, and other
poems

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

